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THE HEROIC SAGA-CYCLE
of
DIETRICH of BERN

by
F. E. SANDBACH

AMS PRESS
NEW YORK

Popular Studies in Mythology Romance & Folklore

No. 15 * The Heroic Saga-
Cycle of Dietrich of Bern.
By F. E. Sandbach

Published by David Nutt, at the
Sign of the Phœnix, Long Acre, London

1906

835
125-00
522
1900
Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Sandbach, Francis Edward, 1874-1946.

The heroic saga-cycle of Dietrich of Bern.

Reprint of the 1906 ed., which was issued as no. 15
of the Popular studies in mythology, romance & folklore.

1. Dietrich von Bern. 2. Thidreks saga.

I. Title. II. Series: Popular studies in mythology,
romance and folklore, no. 15.

PT207.S25 1972

839'.6'3

71-139177

ISBN 0-404-53515-1

Reprinted from the edition of 1906, London

First AMS edition published in 1972

Manufactured in the United States of America

International Standard Book Number:

Complete Set: 0-404-53500-3

Volume 15: 0-404-53515-1

AMS PRESS INC.

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10003

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P R E F A C E

THE aim of the present study is to show how the medieval saga of Dietrich of Bern gradually developed from its origins in History and Mythology, and at the same time to give the reader some idea of the character of the various poems which, together with the Thidrekasaga, comprise the Dietrich Cycle.

Owing to the undesirability of encumbering with foot-notes a popular study such as this is meant to be, I have refrained on the one hand from touching on various interesting, but for my immediate purpose unessential, points, and on the other from quoting in each case the investigators who first put forward the theories here adopted. I must therefore take this opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to both recent and older research, and more especially to the works mentioned in the Bibliography. The Bibliography does not, however, aim at completeness in this or any other respect, but has been selected merely with a view to opening the door to any who

may desire to pursue the subject further. All such will find the fullest possible bibliographical information in the works quoted.

My best thanks are also due to Professor Fiedler, Dr. Breul, and Mr. Alfred Nutt, for reading the proofs and making many valuable suggestions.

F. E. SANDBACH.

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY,
November 27, 1905.

THE HEROIC SAGA-CYCLE OF DIETRICH OF BERN

It may safely be said that, outside a select circle of scholars and students of folk-lore and romance, the saga-cycle of Dietrich of Bern is all but unknown in this country. Unlike the well-known story of Siegfried, that of Dietrich was never wrought into a noble epic like the *Nibelungenlied*, nor has it chanced to fire the poetic fancy of a William Morris or a Wagner. And yet Dietrich's fame was in the Middle Ages more widely spread and longer lived than Siegfried's, while for modern readers a saga-cycle having for its central figure the brilliant Gothic king Theoderic the Great should be hardly less interesting than that of Charlemagne. At first sight, it is true, Dietrich and Theoderic appear to have so little in common, except the name, that even Wilhelm Grimm doubted their identity; yet this very fact lends an additional fascination to the study of the development of the saga, and its explanation affords

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an unusually instructive example of the growth of saga in general.

Thanks to the ancient historians, we are tolerably well informed about Theoderic's life, a short outline of which must form the basis for any study of the Dietrich cycle.

On the collapse of the Hunnish Empire after Attila's death in 453 A.D., the Ostrogoths, under their king Walamer, of the royal Amelung race, became once more independent. Dwelling in Pannonia, between the Danube and the Drave, their territory bordered that of the Eastern Empire, and the Emperor Marcian found it advisable to conclude a treaty, by the terms of which Walamer and his two brothers, Theodemer and Widemer, undertook to protect the frontier in return for a money subsidy. Marcian's successor Leo, however, stopped the payment of this subsidy, and in 462 Walamer invaded Illyria. As a result the treaty was renewed, and Walamer handed over, as a hostage for the fulfilment of his part of the bargain, his nephew Theoderic, then eight years of age.

For ten years Theoderic remained at the Byzantine court, where he received a Roman education and learned to appreciate the advantages of civilisation; but in 472 he returned to his own country, where his father Theodemer had suc-

ceeded Walamer. Two years later the Ostrogoths left Pannonia and settled in Macedonia under the Eastern Emperor's protection, and in the same year Theodemir died and was succeeded by his son.

The opening years of Theoderic's reign gave little promise of its final splendour, and were spent, for the most part, in migration from province to province and continual fighting, now on one side, now on the other, in the series of civil wars that followed the accession of the Emperor Zeno. At last, however, with Theoderic's help, Zeno made his position finally secure, and was able to turn his attention to the Western Empire. Since the sack of Rome by the Vandals under Genseric the Western Emperors had been mere puppets in the hands of their Germanic generals, and the last of them, Romulus Augustulus, had been deposed in 480 by Odoacer, who had from that time ruled in Italy as an independent king. He had, indeed, recognised the justice of Zeno's claim to the Western throne, and had assumed the title of Patrician of the Eastern Empire, but more than this nominal recognition of suzerainty Zeno had not yet been able to extort.

In 488, therefore, he commissioned Theoderic to wrest Italy from the usurper. Much reduced in numbers, but still formidable, the Ostrogoths set out, some quarter of a million men, women,

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and children, on their long and difficult march from Moesia to Italy. Frequently delayed by sickness and by the hostility of the tribes through whose countries they had to pass, it was not until the summer of the next year that they crossed the Alps and arrived at the Isonzo, Odoacer's frontier. In August 489 they forced the passage of the river, and a month later inflicted on Odoacer a second defeat in the battle of Verona.

Odoacer now took refuge in the fortress of Ravenna, while large numbers of his followers deserted to Theoderic. Among these was Tufa, who, having succeeded in winning the victor's confidence, offered to lead a strong force against his former master. By his own desire he was accompanied by several of Theoderic's principal officers, but on meeting Odoacer at Favenzia he returned to his old allegiance and sent the Ostrogoth officers in chains to Ravenna. The other deserters from Odoacer's army now flocked back to their former standard, and Theoderic's situation became desperate. Odoacer had, indeed, succeeded in shutting him in in Pavia when an army of Visigoths from southern Gaul came to his assistance. The siege was raised, and Odoacer, defeated in a battle on the banks of the Adda, was forced to take refuge once more in Ravenna. For two years the fortress held out, but it finally capitulated in 493. By the

terms of surrender, the lives of the defenders were to be spared, but Theoderic, suspecting, it is said, a plot against his life, had Odoacer and all his kinsmen put to death.

Theoderic was now master of Italy, which once more, under his wise and just government, enjoyed the blessings of peace and order, and regained some measure of its former prosperity. In spite of the nominal allegiance he owed to the Eastern Emperor, he was looked up to by all Germanic tribes as the greatest and most powerful of their kings, and his advice and protection were constantly in request. On his death in 526 he was buried in a magnificent marble tomb at Ravenna. This may still be seen, but Theoderic's remains have disappeared, unless, indeed, the skeleton in golden armour found some fifty years ago, in a rough grave not far away, is that of the great Gothic king. Himself an Arian, like all his race, he was hated as a heretic by the Roman Church, and some generations after his death his tomb was violated under cover of night. Though his porphyry coffin was found next morning at the door of a neighbouring monastery, no traces of his body could be discovered, and it seems possible that the riflers of his tomb were sectarian fanatics, who, having no desire to rob the corpse, hastily interred it in the grave in which the armour-clad skeleton was found.

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Such is, in brief, the history of Theoderic the Great,¹ so far as it concerns us here. To his own people he was deservedly a national hero, and no doubt his exploits, especially those belonging to the thirty or more years of exile and wandering between his departure for the Byzantine court and his final victory at Ravenna, formed the themes of epic songs. But popular tradition never remains long in strict accord with history. The popular imagination is ever ready to see its heroes in the most favourable light; it has no accurate memory for details; it removes remembered characters and events from their forgotten historical setting, and forms new and historically impossible connections. In the case of our saga these tendencies were accentuated by the subsequent course of history. Within less than thirty years from Theoderic's death the Eastern Emperor Justinian had reconquered Italy. The great majority of the Ostrogoths perished in the course of the war, and the remainder were either absorbed in the Italian population or took refuge in neighbouring Germanic kingdoms. From this time on, therefore, the saga owed its development to tribes to whom it no longer represented the

¹ A fuller account will be found in E. Gibbon's classical *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, in which the chief authorities are quoted; in H. Bradley, *The Goths* ("Story of the Nations" Series); and in T. Hodgkin, *Theoderic the Goth* ("Heroes of the Nation" Series).

national history, with the result that in course of time the actual facts were distorted almost beyond recognition.

The oldest version of the saga of which we have any evidence is that which forms the background to the fragmentary *Hildebrandslied*, the one remnant we possess of the once rich store of ancient German hero-songs. The rest, including even Charlemagne's collection of Frankish ballads, were ruthlessly destroyed by the zealous Christian clergy; no doubt we owe the almost miraculous preservation of this one fragment to the fortunate chance that, early in the ninth century, two Fuldese monks made a copy of it on the inside cover of a prayer-book. Who they were is not known, but it is a curious coincidence that there were at Fulda at that time two monks named Hiltibrant and Haduprant. Possibly they felt a special interest in their namesakes in the poem and deserve the credit for its preservation.

The *Hildebrandslied*, like the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, is a remnant of the ancient Germanic alliterative poetry, and has for its theme, like the Persian story of Sohrab and Rustem, the meeting of father and son in mortal combat. This story, which appears to have been known to all the Indo-European nations, and which is therefore probably older than their separation

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from the parent stock, was originally independent, but was, in Germany, attached to the saga of Theoderic.

It is thirty years, the poem tells us, since Dietrich (the High German equivalent of Theoderic) was driven from his own kingdom by Otacher (Odoacer) and, accompanied by his faithful vassal Hildebrand, took refuge at Attila's court. Now, at last, he returns at the head of a powerful army to win back his possessions; his forces meet those of Otacher, and Hildebrand finds himself face to face with his son Hadubrant, who had been left behind in his mother's care. Hadubrant refuses to believe that the aged warrior is indeed his father, news of whose death he has heard from seafarers. In vain does Hildebrand attempt to convince his son of the truth; even the offer of golden armlets excites in the youth's mind only a suspicion of treachery, and the older man sees that a tragedy can no longer be averted. The combat begins. With levelled lances they crash together, then dismount and fight with sword and shield; they hew great pieces from each other's bucklers—and there the fragment ends.

Conflicting views have been held as to the outcome of the fight. But though in later

versions (e.g. in the *Thidrekssaga* and the so-called *Younger Hildebrandslied* of the fourteenth century) the father conquers and spares his son, these have a character entirely different from that of the Old High German poem. The tone of the latter is tragic throughout, and it is now generally accepted that it must have ended with the death of the son.

The poem concerns us here, however, only in so far as it helps us to trace the development of the Dietrich saga. The date of the original composition of the *Hildebrandslied* is very uncertain, but it is generally ascribed to the commencement of the eighth century, some two hundred years after Theoderic's death. In these two hundred years the story has become almost unrecognisable, all that remains of historical fact being the struggle between Theoderic and Odoacer and, presumably, the defeat of the latter.

It is easy to understand that Zeno's name should have disappeared from the story, and that Dietrich should consequently be represented as acting entirely on his own behalf. Much more difficult to account for is the conception that the hero of the saga had been first driven from his possessions by Odoacer and had lived for thirty years in exile at Attila's court. But it must be remembered that the development of this form

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of the saga was due not to the Ostrogoths themselves—they had ceased to exist as a nation within thirty years of Theoderic's death—but to other Germanic races. To them Theoderic was the hero of epic songs, and nothing more; in Ostrogothic history they had little or no interest, and such isolated facts as chanced to be remembered would be connected with the developing saga in whatever way seemed most suitable, and without much regard to chronology. We should therefore naturally expect to find the saga considerably at variance with history. The fact that it became a story of expulsion, exile, and return—a theme common enough in hero-saga—may be ascribed, with much probability, to a vague recollection of at least three historical facts: (1) Odoacer's deposition of the last Western Emperor; (2) the tributary relationship of the Ostrogoths to the Huns until Attila's death; (3) the interval of thirty years between Theoderic's departure from home to the Byzantine court and his acquisition of a kingdom by his final victory over Odoacer at Ravenna.

Of these three historical facts the last two may have suggested the idea and determined the place (Attila's court) and the duration of Dietrich's exile, while the first offers a possible explanation of the growth of a tradition of expulsion followed by a period of exile and eventually

by Dietrich's victorious return. The emperor deposed by Odoacer was a mere boy, otherwise unknown to history. We may assume, therefore, that he was soon forgotten, and that the one fact remembered was that Odoacer had gained his throne by usurpation. As the epic songs narrating Theoderic's struggle with Odoacer spread from the Ostrogoths to other tribes, nothing would be more likely than that Theoderic should have been identified with the victim of Odoacer's usurpation and looked upon as eventually recovering what was rightfully his own. Possibly, too, the general belief in the correctness of this version of the cause of enmity between Theoderic and Odoacer was strengthened by the tradition of a previous Gothic settlement in Italy (based on Alaric's invasion early in the fifth century). In view of this tradition the idea that Odoacer had dispossessed not a Roman, but a Gothic ruler, would readily meet with acceptance.

Whether the above is the true explanation of the early development of the Dietrich saga, or whether that development was due partly or entirely to a tendency to adjust new hero-sagas to already existing types, it seems quite clear that Theoderic and Dietrich are identical, and further evidence in favour of this view will appear as we continue to follow out the growth of the saga. Their identity has, however, been

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disputed by some scholars, and a short digression must here be made to notice the views of one of them, J. G. von Hahn.

Some of the earlier investigators of Germanic hero-saga, such as von der Hagen and Trautvetter, were led by the striking discrepancies between the actual lives of Theoderic and other historical characters and the fortunes of their counterparts in saga to favour a mythical or astronomical rather than a historical origin. Following in their footsteps, Hahn in his *Sagwissenschafliche Studien* (Jena, 1876) went so far as to deny the existence of any historical basis whatever either for the Dietrich or for any other saga. In his view Dietrich was only in name identical with the great Theoderic, whose actual history was entirely forgotten, and to whom were attributed the deeds of an ancient mythical sun-hero. The saga itself he held to represent a nature myth, the flight of the summer sun before the dark powers of winter, and its eventual return in spring.

Starting with the assumption that all sagas represent nature myths originating in the pre-historic period before the Indo-European peoples left their common home, Hahn proceeded to compare the Greek, Roman, Germanic, Persian, and Indian sagas with a view to establishing their common origin. He arranged the individual

sagas in groups according to the features they had in common, and thus arrived at "formulæ" containing the main features of the original myth. The Dietrich saga he grouped along with eleven others (*e.g.* the stories of Romulus and Remus, and of Theseus) under what he termed the "Aryan Formula of Exposure and Return," the main features of which were:—

I. **Birth.**—The hero illegitimate, his mother a princess, his father a god or a stranger.

II. **Youth.**—It is prophesied that the hero will supplant his mother's father, hence his exposure; he is suckled by wild beasts, brought up by childless peasants, becomes unmanageable, and goes out into the world to seek service among strangers.

III. **Return.**—He enters his mother's country as a victor, but is driven out again; on the death of his enemy he secures the throne and frees his mother; he founds a city, and finally dies an extraordinary death.

IV. **Subsidiary Characters.**—A youth is falsely accused of adultery and put to death; a wronged servant secures his revenge; the younger brother of the hero is murdered.

How far the Dietrich saga fits in with this formula will be more clearly seen when the medieval poems of the cycle have been dealt

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with. For the present it is enough to remark that while we do actually find all the features enumerated under the fourth heading, and most of those under the third, those under the first two are almost entirely wanting. This difficulty Hahn ingeniously met by boldly assuming that the stories of the birth and youth of Witege, one of the subsidiary characters, belong by right to Dietrich. But as a matter of fact these stories agree with the formula only as regards Witege's birth, and not in one essential point as regards his youth. Moreover, we shall see that the features under the fourth heading were apparently introduced into the Dietrich saga by contamination with the Ermanaric saga, and into this by contamination with the Harlung saga, the mythical origin of which is not disputed. Strictly speaking, the only points in which the Dietrich saga agrees with the formula are that the hero returns in triumph to his own country, rules in security after his enemy's death, and at last meets with an extraordinary, or at any rate mysterious, death himself. The medieval poems tell also of an unsuccessful attempt to drive out the usurper, but this is probably a later addition to the story. In spite, therefore, of the ingenuity and learning displayed by Hahn in arriving at his results, we are forced to the conclusion that the Dietrich saga cannot fairly be claimed

as an example of the Aryan Formula of Exposure and Return. The most that can be admitted is the possibility that the formula, or rather other stories based on it, may have influenced to some extent the later development of the Dietrich saga.

Unshaken, then, in our belief in the historical origin of the Dietrich saga, we can now resume our study of its development from the simple form recognisable as the background of the *Hildebrandslied*.

That this form was at an early date widely known is attested by the Anglo-Saxon poem *Deor's Lament*, in which an allusion is made to Dietrich's thirty years of exile and subsequent return; but it is impossible to say with any certainty to which of the Germanic tribes we owe the development of the saga to this stage. Judging, however, from its further development, it seems to have been more especially among the Alamans on the northern side of the Alps that Dietrich became a favourite hero. Their special interest in the saga would be due partly to the fact that they were the neighbours—often the allies—of the Ostrogoths during Theoderic's reign and until the reconquest of Italy by Belisarius; and partly, perhaps, to the fact that Dietrich formed a contrast to an earlier Ostrogothic king, Ermanaric, the central figure of another saga, which, though also widely known,

owed its development more particularly to the Alamans.

The historical Ermanaric, compared by some Roman historians with Alexander the Great, was a very different character from the Ermanaric of saga. After building up a mighty Gothic empire which extended from the Black Sea to the Gulf of Bothnia, he was in his old age attacked by the Huns on their first appearance in Europe. Unable to induce his subjects to offer any effectual resistance to these fierce and terrible foes, he committed suicide in 375 A.D.

Tradition, however, assigned him a different end. As early as the sixth century the historian Jordanes,¹ himself a Goth, relates rather obscurely that Ermanaric, otherwise the noblest of the Amelungs, avenged the treason of one of his vassals by having his wife Sunilda torn asunder by wild horses. She was in her turn avenged by her brothers, who inflicted on the king a wound that contributed to his death.

Gradually the Ermanaric of saga became the type of cruelty and tyranny, and with him was associated an evil counsellor, Bikka, who, to avenge the death of relatives of his own, incited his master to further atrocities, among them the execution of his only son. According to some of the Norse

¹ *Jordanis Getica* (chap. xxiv.), edited by Mommsen in vol. v., part i., of the *Monumenta Germanicæ Historica*.

sagas, Bikka persuades Ermanaric to ask in marriage Swanhild, the daughter of Sigurd and Gudrun. The king's only son, Randver, is sent to bring home the bride, but on their arrival Bikka accuses them of illicit love, and Ermanaric in his rage has Randver hanged and Swanhild trampled to death by wild horses. Gudrun's sons set out to avenge their sister, but their attempt only partially succeeds, for, after having cut off Ermanaric's hands and feet, they are overcome and slain by his followers.

This story seems to have been influenced by the Harlung saga, which was eventually incorporated in the Ermanaric saga. In the original myth two twins, the Harlungs, were commissioned by the sky-god, Irmintius, to bring home his bride, the sun-maiden. But they themselves were fired with love at sight of the beautiful maid; by means of their treasures they won her favour, and for this crime they were punished with death by the angry god. From this dawn-myth developed the hero-saga of the Harlungs, nephews of Ermanaric, whose evil counsellor accuses them of plotting to win the queen's love. Ermanaric, incensed at their presumption and covetous of their treasure, gets the two youths into his power, and has them hanged.

For a time the two Gothic sagas of Theoderic, brave, wise, generous, and great even in exile,

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and of Ermanaric, powerful, grasping, cruel, the murderer of his own kith and kin, existed side by side. But these two Gothic kings, both of the Amelung race, very naturally came to be thought of as kinsmen, and by the tenth century the tradition had been formed that it was the unscrupulous Ermanaric who had driven his nephew Dietrich into exile and seized his possessions. Odoacer disappeared from the story, and with this change the saga reached the stage which forms the basis of the medieval poems of the Dietrich cycle: Dietrich, whose capital was Bern (= Verona, the first important Italian city reached in crossing from the northern to the southern side of the Alps, and therefore the best known to the Alamans), is expelled from his rightful possessions by his uncle Ermenrich (the High German form of Ermanaric), and goes into exile at Attila's court. At the end of thirty (some sources say thirty-two) years he returns at the head of a powerful army to reconquer his own. Ermenrich is defeated at the battle of Ravenna, and after his death Dietrich rules once more in security over his own lands.

Though we have no direct proof that at this stage of the development of the saga Ermenrich met not only with defeat, but also with death, at Dietrich's hands, this issue to the conflict was demanded by poetic justice, and was certainly

current at a somewhat later period. According to a Low German poem printed in the sixteenth century, but based on a much older ballad, and generally known as *Ermenrichs Tod*, Ermenrich escaped after his defeat, and for long successfully eluded his pursuers. At last, however, Dietrich discovered the castle in which he had taken refuge, and, choosing only eleven followers, set off to complete his revenge. Having a garrison of 350 men in his castle, and seeing his nephew apparently in his power, Ermenrich ordered the gates to be thrown open, whereupon Dietrich rushed in with his companions, cut down all who barred his way, and with one terrible blow slew his treacherous enemy.

Unfortunately none of the other poems of the Dietrich cycle agree with this version. This is due to the fact that later on a conception arose (*cf.* p. 30) that Dietrich eventually returned to his own country unopposed. This would, of course, have been impossible until after Ermenrich's death, which was therefore accounted for in various ways. In the so-called *Anhang zum Heldenbuch* Eckehart kills him to avenge the murder of the Harlungs, while according to the *Thidrekssaga* he dies of an incurable disease. In most of the poems, however, his death is passed over in silence.

The further development of the Dietrich saga was determined chiefly by the constant endeavour

to add to Dietrich's fame by ascribing to him all manner of valiant deeds. Additions of this kind were, indeed, almost demanded to account for the traditional thirty years of inactivity at Attila's court; for it was incredible that so famous a hero as Dietrich should have passively endured so long an exile, or that he should have failed to take part in Attila's wars and to make some return by his valour for the hospitality he enjoyed. His connection with Attila thus came to be of the greatest importance for the further development of the saga, with the result that the original basis of expulsion, exile, and return, though not forgotten, fell into the background, while the main interest centred in interpolated episodes. According to the medieval saga he makes an unsuccessful attempt, with the help of troops lent by Attila, to reconquer his own, in the course of which campaign Attila's two sons meet their death; he rids the neighbourhood of Attila's court of a man-eating ogre; he proves his valour in Attila's wars with Slavonic tribes; he marries Herrat, the niece of Attila's consort Helche; he is the leader of the twelve knights who journey to Worms, under Attila's patronage, to measure themselves with Kriemhild's twelve champions; and he it is who finally conquers the Burgundian heroes, Gunther and Hagen, when all Attila's vassals have been slain.

Of these interpolations Dietrich's exploits against the Slavs, as related in the *Thidrekssaga* and in the fragmentary High German poem of *Dietrich und Wenezlan*, and his victory over Kriemhild's till then invincible champion, Siegfried (*cf.* p. 31), are but loosely connected with the saga; his marriage with Herrat, too, is of little interest, except in so far as it emphasises the closeness, according to medieval tradition, of the ties between Dietrich and Attila; while the story of the slaying of the ogre and rescue of a maiden about to be devoured, as told in *Etzel's Hofhaltung*, is a comparatively late addition to the cycle of Dietrich poems, composed in imitation of the mythical stories of Dietrich's youthful adventures, and mentioned here only because the author chose to assign it to the period of exile. The remaining additions to the saga, however, require more detailed notice.

Dietrich's unsuccessful campaign appears to have been originally conceived as taking place in the twentieth year of his exile, and as ending in a defeat—with which was connected, perhaps at a later stage, an old tradition of the death of Attila's two sons. But in course of time the idea that the popular hero ever suffered defeat at the hands of his rapacious uncle became intolerable, and he is actually represented in the medieval poems as going voluntarily into exile after winning

all his battles. The most remarkable development of this conception is found in *Dietrichs Flucht*, a brief summary of which will serve, if we disregard the multiplication of his victories and subsequent returns into exile, to give a rough idea of the form of the saga taken for granted by the other poems of the cycle.

Heinrich der Vogler, the author of *Dietrichs Flucht*, opens with a long and fanciful genealogy in the most approved medieval style. He connects his hero's ancestors with the heroes of other well-known sagas, recounts many of their adventures and exploits, and at last comes to Dietrich's father Dietmar, and his uncles Ermenrich and Diether, the father of the Harlung princes. He then tells how Sibeche (the German representative of the Norse Bikka) incites Ermenrich to the murder of the two Harlung princes and to an infamous plot against Dietrich's life. Fortunately Dietrich is warned and saved from falling into the trap set for him, whereupon Ermenrich collects a great army and marches on Bern. Though possessing a vastly inferior force, Dietrich succeeds in taking Ermenrich by surprise, and completely defeats him, taking prisoner his son Friedrich.

Desiring to reward his followers for their valour, Dietrich sends a picked body of them to escort to Bern a large treasure, but they are ambushed on their return journey by a large

force of Ermenrich's men and carried off as prisoners. Ermenrich now threatens to hang them all in revenge for his defeat. The reminder that his son Friedrich is in Dietrich's power fails to move him, and Dietrich is compelled to purchase their lives by surrendering his kingdom and going into exile.

After many years of exile at Attila's court news comes that Dietrich's party have recovered possession of Bern. He returns, defeats another army sent against him by Ermenrich, and, after appointing trusty vassals as governors of the various provinces of his kingdom, leads back to Attila a force of Huns lent for the campaign. During his absence Witege yields to bribery, goes over to Ermenrich (as Tufa did to Odoacer), and surrenders to him the important fortress of Ravenna. With a new army of Huns, Dietrich returns once more, and again defeats Ermenrich, who takes refuge in Bologna. But Dietrich has lost so many of his best warriors that a siege is impossible, and, realising that he can enjoy no safety in Bern while his uncle lives, he once more returns to Attila.

At this point Heinrich der Vogler, apparently tiring of his subject, concludes his tedious narrative; but in a second poem, the *Rabenschlacht* (Battle of Ravenna), he provides a sort of sequel. This consists in another victorious campaign, in

the course of which, however, Dietrich's brother and Attila's two sons are slain. But it is in this tragedy that the interest of the *Rabenschlacht* centres, and the author, after telling of Dietrich's third return to Attila with his sad news, is content to omit all mention of the final recovery of his kingdom and of Ermenrich's death.

In addition to the assumption that Dietrich took part in Attila's wars with the Slavs, and to the invention of one or more unsuccessful attempts to regain his throne, a welcome opportunity of adding to Dietrich's fame and swelling the list of exploits performed during the time of exile offered itself in connection with the Nibelungen tragedy. Tradition having fixed the scene of this great catastrophe, in which the Burgundians perish to a man fighting against overwhelming odds, in Attila's capital, the inference that Dietrich played a leading part in the conflict must have been irresistible to the medieval mind. It was undoubtedly drawn and readily accepted, but, curiously enough, it is only the *Nibelungenlied*, and a portion of the *Thidrekssaga* based on the *Nibelungenlied*, that have preserved the resulting story of his tardy but decisive intervention. It is quite evident, however, from the characterisation of Dietrich and his followers, especially Hildebrand and Wolfhart, that the Dietrich episode in the *Nibelungenlied* represents a lost

poem of the Dietrich cycle. Dietrich is pictured as an honoured guest at Etzel's (Attila's) court. Suspecting that Kriemhild is planning treachery, he rides out to meet the Burgundians on their approach and warns them to be on their guard. But the catastrophe is inevitable, and when, at last, the fighting begins at the banquet, he determines to hold aloof. Out of friendship for Etzel he escorts him and Kriemhild in safety from the banqueting hall, but firmly refuses to yield to Kriemhild's entreaties to take her side in the conflict. His followers, however, become involved through the hot-headedness of Wolfhart, and all are slain except old Hildebrand, who returns wounded to tell his master the news. Now Dietrich has no choice but to avenge his Amelungs. Donning his armour, he goes forth to fight the two surviving Burgundian heroes, whom he delivers bound to Kriemhild. In spite of his request that their lives shall be spared, Kriemhild has Gunther slain in the hope of learning from Hagen the hiding-place of the Nibelung treasure. But when Hagen sees Gunther's head before him, he exclaims that the secret is now known to God and himself alone, and that she shall never know it. In her fury Kriemhild seizes his sword—once Siegfried's—and in the presence of Etzel, Dietrich, and Hildebrand, strikes off his head. Hildebrand

(perhaps in the original version, as in the *Thidrekssaga*, Dietrich), enraged to see a brave warrior die so shameful a death, springs forward and kills her too. Then, according to the *Klage*, leaving Attila's court full of mourning for the death of so many valiant men, Dietrich and Hildebrand, themselves weighed down with sorrow, set out for Bern.

This connection of Dietrich with the Nibelungen catastrophe is not only finely motivated and interesting in itself, but is also important as having brought about a change in the general outline of the Dietrich saga. For, having lost all his followers except Hildebrand, Dietrich could no longer be supposed to have eventually recovered his own by force of arms. Hence it is that in all the extant medieval poems (except *Ermenrichs Tod*) his return, if alluded to, is represented as taking place without opposition and after Ermenrich's death.

Slow to anger, but terrible and invincible in the rage of battle, loyal and generous to vassals and friends, steadfast in misfortune, Dietrich possessed just the qualities to make him a favourite with the soldiery and peasantry who formed the audiences of the wandering minstrels; and although the Dietrich saga was never wrought into a complete epic like the *Nibelungenlied*, there is no doubt that, like Siegfried

in the Rhine country, Dietrich was by far the most popular hero of saga in south-eastern, and perhaps also in north-western, Germany. From the time of his introduction into the *Nibelungenlied* he and Siegfried would naturally be thought of as contemporaries during their youth, and the motive of a contest between the two invincible heroes would readily suggest itself to singers in search of something new with which to secure the interest of their hearers. As a matter of fact we have three distinct treatments of this theme. In the *Thidrekssaga*, Siegfried, as the banner-bearer of King Isung of Bertangaland, fights with and is overcome, though only through trickery, by Dietrich; in *Biterolf* a great battle between the Rhenish heroes, among them Siegfried, and the Austro-Bavarian heroes, among them Dietrich, ends in the defeat of the former; in the *Rosengarten zu Worms* (*Der grosse Rosengarten*) Kriemhild's twelve champions, including Siegfried, are one by one worsted in single combat by twelve of Etzel's knights under the leadership of Dietrich. The last two stories may safely be assigned to Austro-Bavarian authors jealous for the fame of their national hero, while in the first an Austro-Bavarian original seems to have been tampered with in Siegfried's favour by a northern redactor.

In addition, however, to what may be termed

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its own organic development, a great and popular saga has the power of attracting to itself other less developed sagas and shorter epic songs, the contents of which eventually form episodes in the complete saga. We have already seen how the primitive story of mortal conflict between father and son was, in Germany, attached to the Dietrich saga and became an episode in the return from exile. Similar episodes, originally foreign to the saga, occur in the later poems of the cycle in the narratives of Alphart's death and of the tragic fate that befell Etzel's sons and Dietrich's brother.

For the latter story there is historical foundation in so far as one of Attila's sons did actually fall in a battle with the Goths, and no doubt the event once formed the subject of epic songs. In course of time, however, it was connected with Dietrich's unsuccessful attempt to reconquer his kingdom with the help of Attila's Huns, and it appears both in the *Rabenschlacht* and in the *Thidrekssaga* as an episode of the battle of Ravenna. The death of Dietrich's brother did not form part of the original story, but was added later, perhaps to relieve Dietrich of any suspicion of having failed to take due care of the young princes, and to smooth the way to Etzel's forgiveness.

Etzel, we are told in the *Rabenschlacht*, had

equipped an army of Huns to assist Dietrich in his expedition, and his two sons, Ort and Scharf, begged for permission to take part in the campaign. Their mother Helche was most unwilling to let them go, for in a dream she had seen them carried off and slain by a dragon; but their importunity, together with Dietrich's pledges for their safety and the example he set by taking with him his youthful brother Diether, finally won her consent.

Italy reached, it was decided to leave the three young princes at Bern (Verona) under the care of the aged Elsan; but scarcely had Dietrich marched on towards Ravenna, where Ermenrich was encamped, than they contrived to escape. Having persuaded their guardian by dint of coaxing and entreaties to ride out with them into the open country, they set off at a gallop before his stiff limbs were in the saddle, and when he reached the city gate they were nowhere to be seen. His shouts brought no reply, and a thick mist settling over the fields hid the runaways from pursuit.

In high spirits over their successful dash for liberty, the headstrong youths rode on all day till night overtook them on a lonely heath only a few miles, though they did not know it, from Ravenna. The next morning, when the mists had dispersed, they were admiring

the beauty of the scene, when they spied riding towards them a knight in full armour. It was Witege, as Diether quickly saw, and they at once determined to taunt him with his desertion from Dietrich and challenge him to fight. Unwilling to stain his hands with the blood of mere striplings, Witege patiently bore their reproaches and did all in his power to dissuade them from their purpose, but was at last attacked by Scharf and forced to kill him in self-defence. Ort now rushed in to avenge his brother, but though he fought valiantly he was no match for Witege. In vain did the latter, during a pause for rest, exhort his opponent to give up the unequal contest; before long Ort had shared his brother's fate. There was now only Diether left. Determined either to avenge his comrades or to die himself, he fought with Witege throughout the day, but at last he, too, was overcome, and the three youths all lay dead among the heather.

Wounded and exhausted, Witege lay down to rest not far from the scene of the conflict, but before long Dietrich, who had meanwhile gained a decisive victory, came upon the scene. At first he was overwhelmed by grief, and flung himself down beside the dead bodies, but then came the thought of vengeance. The wounds, he saw, must have been made by Witege's sword Mimung,

and just as he noticed this a cry arose from his followers, for not far away was Witege himself mounting his horse to escape. A hot pursuit followed, in which Dietrich soon outdistanced his companions, but even then no taunts or insults could induce the fugitive to turn and face his former lord. On they raced till they reached the seashore, and Dietrich was at last on the point of securing his vengeance, when Witege disappeared before his very eyes, spirited away by the mermaid Wachilde, his ancestress.

A somewhat similar story to this, possibly indeed an imitation of it, is that of Alphart's death, frequently alluded to in the poems of the cycle, but told in detail only in *Alpharts Tod*. The poem opens with a declaration of war carried by Heime from Ermenrich to Dietrich. As soon as the messenger had ridden off again, a council of war was held, and Alphart, the most promising of the younger warriors, and beloved alike by young and old, offered to go out and watch for the enemy's approach while Dietrich collected his forces. In vain did his brother Wolfhart and his uncle Hildebrand endeavour to dissuade him; he claimed the right to be given an opportunity of proving his valour, and at last won Dietrich's permission to undertake the dangerous duty.

Full of confidence in his strength and prowess, he donned his armour, girt on his sword, and rode

off to a hill commanding the road by which Ermenrich must advance. Before long he saw approaching one of Ermenrich's knights with a company of eighty men, and eagerly challenged him to single combat. As they came together at full gallop, Alphart's lance passed through his opponent's body, and of the eighty men at arms who attempted to avenge their leader eight only escaped and returned wounded to the main army.

For a time no other of Ermenrich's knights would venture to face the young and unknown warrior, but at last Witege volunteered to go. On the way his courage sank, but to have turned back would have brought him lifelong disgrace, and he soon found himself on the corpse-strewn hill. A short parley ensued, in which Alphart reproached Witege for his disloyalty to Dietrich, and then the combat began.

Witege quickly discovered that his opponent's prowess had been by no means exaggerated by the fugitives. He was unhorsed at the first shock, and, after a sharp fight on foot, found himself stretched on the ground beneath his shield, and entirely at Alphart's mercy. The latter, however, chivalrously refrained from taking advantage of his foe; but, as he paused, Witege's friend Heime, who had secretly followed and watched the fight, rushed out from behind a tree, and made the impudent sugges-

tion that the combat should be broken off, Alphart returning to Bern, and he and Witege telling Ermenrich they had failed to find their enemy. "God forbid!" cried Alphart indignantly; "unless Witege become my prisoner, the fight must go on."

Heime thereupon stood aside, but Witege had no mind to face Alphart again alone, and begged his friend not to forsake him. At first Heime refused to sacrifice his honour by helping Witege against his youthful opponent; but finally the argument that, when his friend was slain, he would surely meet the same fate, proved effective, and after Alphart had rejected a final offer of peace, the unequal contest began.

Alphart defended himself manfully for a time against his enemies, but at last, feeling his arm grow weary, he cried: "If you murder me here, Witege and Heime, two to one, you will sin against God, and be disgraced for ever." "He speaks truly," said Heime to his friend; "I will withstand him alone." But Witege would not be persuaded, and the fight continued as before. Alphart now slung his shield on his back, and felled his foes by turns with mighty blows, but even his great strength failed at last. Once more he reminded them of their unknighly conduct, and offered even yet to forget it if they would but meet him singly; but Witege again refused,

and soon Alphart fell to the ground exhausted and defenceless. Then Witege thrust his sword through the slit in his armour. "Base cowards, men without honour!" cried the youthful warrior, and expired.

The three poems already summarised, *Dietrichs Flucht*, the *Rabenschlacht*, and *Alpharts Tod*, are based on the semi-historical tradition of Dietrich's expulsion, exile, and return; but all the remaining poems of the cycle are of a totally different character, and deal with his earlier adventures among giants, dwarfs, dragons, and other representatives of a debased mythology. It is not necessary to assume that the original hero of these stories was a mythical Dietrich. We have ample testimony of the historical Dietrich's popularity among the peasantry of nearly all parts of Germany, and know that among them stories of Dietrich were current for several centuries. It was among the peasantry, of course, that the ancient myths longest survived, and it is quite probable that some of the stories in question were actually myths, in which Dietrich had replaced the original hero. But however that may be, it seems clear that we owe the mythical Dietrich poems to wandering minstrels who turned to account the rustic myths and Dietrich stories, combined them as it suited their purposes, and added to them similar episodes of their own invention.

The mythical character of the stories on which some, at any rate, of the medieval poems are based is most evident in the various versions of Dietrich's victory over the giants Ecke and Fasolt. There can be no doubt that Ecke was a storm spirit, and the original myth a storm myth, representing the victory of natural forces friendly to mankind over the destructive fury of the elements. In Ecke himself, whose name is explained as meaning "The Terrifier," we clearly recognise a personification of the storm when we read how his passage through the forest brought the branches crashing from the trees, and how birds and beasts fled in terror at his approach. His brother Fasolt, too, reappears in a similar character in an old weather charm in which he is called upon to drive away the tempest; the three princesses in the castle of Jochgrimm, who send out Ecke on his quest of Dietrich, are no doubt identical with the three ancient witches of the modern Tyrolese fairy tale, who brew bad weather on the summit of Jochgrimm mountain; and the maiden hunted through the forest by Fasolt and his hounds was once a wood-nymph fleeing from the storm.

The original conqueror of these storm giants must evidently have been not Dietrich, but some mythical hero or god, very possibly, as Uhland first suggested, Donar (the German name for

Thor), the Thunderer, whose combats with the giants are well known from Scandinavian mythology. In that case we may suppose that, after the introduction of Christianity into the district where the myth was current, the heathen god's place in the story was taken by Dietrich of Bern, whose popularity and traditional invincibility made him the best possible substitute.

Originating from a purely local Tyrolese myth, the story of the slaying of Ecke by Dietrich presumably struck the fancy of some wandering gleeman who worked it up into poetic form and sang or recited it to many fresh audiences as he continued his travels. At any rate, however it came about, the story was well known by the middle of the thirteenth century, not only in southern but also in northern Germany, where it found a new home, and whence, after being localised afresh in Westphalia, it was carried to Norway, to be made use of by the compiler of the *Thidrekssaga*. In the course of its wanderings it naturally underwent many alterations and received many additions, with the result that the High German versions still extant not only differ widely from the account given in the *Thidrekssaga*, but also vary considerably among themselves. The following brief account is broadly representative of the High German versions.

In the castle of Jochgrimm there dwelt three

princesses, whose wooers were the giant brothers Ecke, Fasolt, and Ebenrot. Dietrich's fame having spread to Jochgrimm, one of the princesses, Seburg, sends out the youthful Ecke to bring Dietrich to their castle, dead or alive. She presents her chosen knight with a magnificent suit of armour and buckles it on with her own hands; a fine charger, too, she offers him, but as no horse could carry him in battle he sets off on foot. With huge strides he runs and leaps through field and forest, the animals fleeing in terror and the birds forgetting to sing.

On arriving at Bern, where at sight of his flashing armour the inhabitants seek safety in their houses, he learns from Hildebrand that Dietrich has ridden away to the Tyrol in search of adventure. He at once sets off in pursuit, and on the way comes across a knight lying grievously wounded by the roadside, the one survivor of four with whom Dietrich had recently fought. Ecke binds up his wounds, resumes his way, undaunted by the wounded man's earnest warnings, and not long after nightfall overtakes Dietrich in a gloomy forest lighted up only by the flashes from their armour.

Hearing the clank of Ecke's weapons, Dietrich turned to see who was following him and to inquire his errand. The young giant's impetuous challenge, however, he declined to accept, and

when Ecke tried to rouse him by recounting the virtues of the sword and armour he would win if victorious, Dietrich quietly declared that it would be madness on his part to fight against such weapons. But Ecke would not be denied; he strode along by Dietrich's side, endeavouring by taunts and insults to rouse his anger, and at length exclaimed that he was determined to fight even though God Himself should aid Dietrich. "It is clear that you are tired of life," replied the latter; "since you grant me God's help, your death is sure." The combat began, and lasted far into the next day; but at last Dietrich's battle-fury came upon him, and, closing with his opponent, he threw him to the ground. Though now in his enemy's power, Ecke obstinately refused all offers of mercy and even of comradeship, and Dietrich was compelled to give him the *coup de grâce*.

Dietrich now stripped him of his armour and cut off his head to take to the princess who had sent him on his fatal errand. Proceeding on his way, he came upon a water-fairy sleeping by a spring, and after she had dressed his wounds and warned him of the perils he would encounter, he set off for the land of the giants. One day, as he was riding through the forest, he came upon a maiden fleeing for her life from Ecke's brother Fasolt and his hounds.

Dietrich at once took her under his protection, and, after overcoming her pursuer, made him swear allegiance and forced him to lead the way to Jochgrimm. More than once Fasolt tried to avenge his brother and regain his liberty by treachery; and as they arrived before the castle he all but succeeded, for there stood before the entrance two wonderful statues, fully armed, that struck at all who passed between. Not suspecting the trap, Dietrich rode straight on, and barely escaped the terrible blows meant to destroy him. Then, having slain Fasolt for this final act of treachery, he entered the castle, and made his way to the great hall where the three princesses were holding their brilliant court. "You wished to see Dietrich of Bern," he cried. "Here he is, and here the greeting of your messenger." And with that he flung Ecke's head at their feet, left the hall without further words, and rode home to Bern.

Dietrich was, however, not always so successful in his combats with the giants, for there existed an old and widespread tradition that he once fell into their power and was held captive until rescued by his followers. The oldest evidence of the existence of this tradition occurs as early as the ninth century in the second *Waldere Fragment*—a remnant of an Anglo-Saxon version of the South German saga of Walter of Aquitaine

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—where we are told that Widia (Witege) once set Dietrich free and enabled him to escape from the land of the giants. The story here referred to, or others like it, evidently lived on among the peasantry; for the conception on which it is based reappears in various forms in the Middle High German poems of *Sigenôt*, *Virginal*, and perhaps *Laurin*, all of which, like the *Eckenlied*, have developed from stories of Tyrolese origin. In *Sigenôt* and *Virginal* Dietrich is for a time the captive of the giants, in *Laurin* of the dwarfs. In *Sigenôt* he is rescued by Hildebrand, in *Virginal* by a number of his followers, among them Hildebrand and Witege (though an allusion in *Alpharts Tod* seems to show that in the original of the *Virginal* story it was Witege alone who rescued both Dietrich and Heime), while in *Laurin* it is to the help of a maiden who had been carried off by the dwarf that Dietrich and his men owe their deliverance. This last motive appears also in *Virginal*, where the sister of Duke Nitger, to whom the giants are subject, frustrates their attempts on their prisoner's life.

In the older version of *Sigenôt* we read how Dietrich was one day riding alone through a forest near Bern when he came suddenly upon the giant Sigenot sound asleep. Being in search of adventures, he wakened the giant none too gently (with a kick, according to the later ver-

sions), whereupon Sigenot rose up, and recognising the slayer of his kinsman Grim, announced his intention of taking vengeance. Without more ado he felled Dietrich with his cudgel, carried him off through the forest, and cast him into a deep pit infested by snakes.

Meanwhile Hildebrand had set out in search of his master, and, as luck would have it, met Sigenot returning towards Bern. On learning his name and errand the giant attacked him furiously; but the old warrior defended himself valiantly until his sword was struck from his hand, whereupon Sigenot caught him up by the beard and carried him off ignominiously to share his master's fate. But at the mouth of the pit Hildebrand spied Dietrich's sword, and, snatching it up, quickly despatched his captor. Then, stripping off his clothes, he made a rope and lowered it into the pit. It broke, however, under Dietrich's weight, and it was only the friendly help of the dwarf Eggerich, who showed him where to find a ladder, that at length enabled him to rescue the king from his undesirable quarters.

The long and rambling poem known as *Virginal*, other versions of which exist under the titles *Dietrichs erste Ausfahrt* and *Dietrich und seine Gesellen*, appears to have for its ultimate basis a story including both Dietrich's captivity among the giants, as in *Sigenôt*, and his rescue of a

maiden from their clutches, as in the Fasolt episode of the *Eckenlied* and in *Etzels Hofhaltung* (cf. p. 25). Possibly the composer of *Virginal* did not know the story in its original simple form; but, in whatever form he did know it, he undoubtedly added to and altered it very extensively in order to produce for court circles a sort of imitation of the Arthurian romances. The result is a, for the most part tedious, series of adventures and festivities loosely strung together and containing numerous self-contradictions, which may, however, be due to alterations made by later redactors.

As *Virginal* consists of upwards of 14,000 lines, space does not permit of a full account of its contents being given, and the following brief indication of the chief episodes must suffice. News comes to Bern that the maiden Queen Virginal of Jeraspunt is hard put to it to defend her realm against the Saracen Orkise, and has been forced to pay annual tribute in the shape of a maiden from her court. Dietrich and Hildebrand set out to free her from her oppressor. In the forest they separate, and Hildebrand comes upon one of Virginal's maidens who has just been brought to the spot agreed upon with the Saracen and left for him to carry off. Soon he appears, fights with Hildebrand, and is slain. Mean-

while Dietrich has become embroiled with a number of Orkise's followers, but Hildebrand comes to his help and the infidels are put to flight. The maiden then hastens back to Virginal's court with the good news, and the queen sends by the dwarf Bibung a cordial invitation to her deliverers. But they are destined to meet with many adventures before reaching Jeraspunt. They are attacked by dragons, from the jaws of one of which they rescue a knight named Rentwin. After exterminating the whole brood, they accompany Rentwin to his father's castle, where they rest and make merry till their wounds are healed. They then set out for Jeraspunt, accompanied by their late hosts, and Dietrich in his eagerness rides on ahead of his companions. But he loses his way and arrives near the castle of Duke Nitger. Meeting one of the duke's giants, he asks his way to Virginal's court, but as he turns to retrace his steps, the giant fells him with his steel club and carries him off as a prisoner to the castle. Duke Nitger, who is actually more afraid of his giants than they are of him, has to take charge of Dietrich pending his ransom. Meanwhile, however, the giants make attempts on Dietrich's life, and it is only thanks to the kindness of Nitger's sister that their plans are foiled. At last Hildebrand,

with a large army from Bern and other realms whose rulers were friendly to Dietrich, arrives before the castle. The giants, twelve in number, are slain by twelve of the besiegers' champions (one of whom was Dietrich, set free for the purpose), and Nitger having been pardoned for his sister's sake, all set out for Jeraspunt. On the way they engage in further combats with dragons and giants, but finally arrive safe and sound at Virginal's castle, where they are welcomed enthusiastically and entertained by a long round of festivities. According to *Dietrichs erste Ausfahrt* and *Dietrich und seine Gesellen*, Dietrich takes home Virginal to Bern as his bride.

In the *Eckenlied*, *Sigenôt*, and *Virginal*, giants are Dietrich's principal opponents, but in *Laurin* (or *Der kleine Rosengarten*) and in *Goldemar* we see that tradition ascribed to him equally marvellous adventures in dwarf-land. Possibly both these poems are based on one and the same ancient myth of the capture of a maiden by dwarfs, or elves, and her eventual release by a hero who makes her his wife. If such was the theme of the original story, it appears to have been more closely adhered to in *Goldemar* than in *Laurin*; but as we possess only fragments of a *Goldemar* poem, by a certain Albrecht von Kemenaten, and a couple of

allusions in later medieval literature, we know nothing of the details of the story. We can infer, however, that Dietrich, having fought with and overcome Goldemar, married the maiden he had rescued.

In *Laurin* the original story is complicated by the introduction of the rose-garden motive. Like Kriemhild in the *Rosengarten zu Worms* (*cf.* p. 31) the dwarf-king possesses a wonderful rose-garden in which he takes especial pride, and all who have as yet entered the garden have been conquered by the dwarf and punished by the loss of a hand and a foot. Thither, in consequence of Hildebrand's taunts, Dietrich rides in company with Witege; but while the former is too much impressed by the beauty and fragrance of the flowers to despoil the garden, the latter ruthlessly rides in on horse-back and hacks at and tramples down the bloom-covered bushes. Laurin appears, only three spans high, but magnificently mounted and armed, and at the first charge flings Witege from his saddle. Thereupon Dietrich, to save his vassal from paying the usual penalty, takes upon himself all responsibility for the damage done, and challenges the dwarf to fight.

Meanwhile old Hildebrand, knowing the difficulties and dangers in store for his master, had followed with a number of Dietrich's men,

and arrived upon the scene just as Dietrich and Laurin were levelling their lances for the charge. On his advice, Dietrich, instead of thrusting in knightly fashion, brought his weapon heavily down on his opponent's head; but before he could repeat the blow the dwarf put on his *tarn-kappe* (a cloak which rendered the wearer invisible, like that won by Siegfried from the dwarf Alberich in the Nibelungen story) and Dietrich now received wound after wound from his unseen foe. But again Hildebrand came to his help. After persuading Laurin to decide the contest by a wrestling match, he secretly advised Dietrich to wrench off the girdle that gave his adversary the strength of twelve men, and the dwarf soon found himself at Dietrich's mercy. He had just given up all for lost when he noticed among the bystanders Dietleib of Styria, whose sister Künhild he had carried off. Up to that moment none knew by whom, or whither, she had been spirited away, and when Dietleib heard himself appealed to by the dwarf as his brother-in-law he was so overjoyed at discovering a trace of his sister, and so anxious to find and release her, that he intervened on Laurin's behalf, and Dietrich was at last persuaded to spare his life.

Laurin now invited them all to accompany him into the mountain and inspect his treasures. It

was not without fear of treachery that they followed him, but once inside they forgot all danger in wondering at the wealth that surrounded them, in drinking the delicious mead and wine set before them, in watching the dances and tournaments, and in listening to the music and songs of their host's subjects. One by one Dietrich and his men were overcome by the strong wine, and when all were helpless Laurin had them disarmed, bound, and cast into a deep dungeon. There they would probably have lain till they perished of hunger, had not Künhild set free her brother, who was imprisoned apart from the rest, and brought him all the weapons. He at once hurried to his companions' dungeon and set them free, but it was only after a hard fight, in which they were helped by Künhild's counter-charms against the magic of the dwarfs, that they overcame Laurin and his followers.

The remainder of the poem, telling of the return to Bern with the dwarf-king as their prisoner, of Künhild's departure for Styria with her brother, of Laurin's treatment during his captivity, his eventual conversion to Christianity, his reconciliation with Dietrich and his return to his own kingdom, is evidently of comparatively late origin; and of still later is the continuation in which we read how Walberan collected an immense army of dwarfs and marched to Bern to

set Laurin free, but on his arrival found Dietrich and Laurin reconciled.

With *Laurin* we conclude our survey of the poems of the Dietrich cycle, and there remains only the prose *Thidrekssaga*, to which occasional reference has been made, but which has so far received no further notice. The *Thidrekssaga* was originally composed in Norway about the middle of the thirteenth century by an Icelandic saga-writer, who drew his material from songs and stories then current in North Germany. His work was recast and largely expanded by one or more redactors, and is, in its present form, a rich treasury of Germanic saga. In it a number of the Germanic sagas have been brought into connection with the Dietrich saga and each other; but in spite of this it has frequently preserved features of the original sagas that are wanting in the South German epics.

The *Thidrekssaga* opens with what professes to be an account of Dietrich's ancestry, beginning with the history of his grandfather Samson, the hero of a Frankish saga. Samson, we learn, left two sons, Ermenrich and Dietmar (to retain the Middle High German forms of the names for the sake of clearness and uniformity), the latter of whom was Dietrich's father. Then follows an account of Dietrich's youth, in which we are told of Hildebrand's arrival at Dietmar's court during

Dietrich's seventh year, of the close friendship that grew up between Hildebrand and Dietrich; further how Dietrich forced the dwarf Alberich to give him his sword Nagelring, how he slew the giant couple Grim and Hilde, and how he fought a duel with Heime, spared his life, and enrolled him among his followers.

At this point a digression introduces the Wilkina saga, stories of the Slavonic king Wilkinus and of the warfare of Osantrix, king of Wilkina-land, with Attila. Then follows the Wieland (Wayland Smith) saga, Wieland being made the son of Wade (the Wate of the *Gudrun* epic, and the Wade of Middle English literature), and the grandson of Wilkinus. With the story of the birth and youth of Witege, Wieland's illegitimate son, the purpose of this lengthy digression at last appears, and the Dietrich saga is resumed.

Witege, like Heime, comes to Bern to try his prowess against Dietrich. In the duel he is at first outmatched, but on receiving from Hildebrand his own sword Mimung, which the latter had secretly exchanged for another, he presses Dietrich hard. He spares his life, however, on Hildebrand's intervention, and becomes, like Heime, one of Dietrich's companions. To retrieve his disgrace Dietrich rides out alone in search of adventures, slays Ecke, vanquishes Fasolt, whom he takes into his service, and kills an elephant and

a dragon, rescuing from the latter Hildebrand's kilsman Sintram, with whom he returns to Bern.

Dietrich's fame continues to attract one hero after another to Bern, the arrival of Dietleib providing the opportunity of working in the story of Biterolf and Dietleib, and the duel of the latter with Walter of Aquitaine. In course of time King Dietmar dies and is succeeded by Dietrich, who becomes the ally of Attila in a new war with Osantrix. Shortly after returning home he engages in another expedition to assist his uncle Ermenrich in punishing Rimstein, by whom the tribute due had been refused.

Here a new digression is made to bring in the ancestry, birth, and youthful exploits of Siegfried, the hero of the Nibelungen saga, up to his instalment as standard-bearer to King Isung of Bertangaland. Hearing of Siegfried's prowess, Dietrich sets out with twelve chosen warriors to Bertangaland, where a series of duels takes place between his and Isung's champions. Last of all Dietrich meets Siegfried, who, however, stipulates that his opponent shall not use Witege's sword Mimung. For two days they fight without either wounding the other, but on the third day Dietrich, deceiving Siegfried by a quibble, uses Mimung and gains the advantage, whereupon Siegfried exchanges from Isung's into his service. On the way home they visit Worms, and the opportunity

is seized to work in the stories of Siegfried's marriage with Kriemhild, and Gunther's with Brunhild. These are followed by the sagas of Herbolt and Hilde, Walter of Aquitaine and Hildegund, and Iron and Apollonius, after which the so often broken thread of the Dietrich saga is once more taken up.

Ermenrich having outraged the wife of Sibeche (who corresponds to the Norse Bikka), the latter sets himself to avenge his honour by bringing about the death first of Ermenrich's three sons, then of his two nephews, the young Harlung princes, by means of evil counsels and false accusations. Finally he persuades Ermenrich to demand tribute from Dietrich as a test of his loyalty. On his refusal an army marches on Bern, and Dietrich takes refuge with Attila. He again takes part in wars with Osantrix, whose death during the last campaign is overlooked, and against King Waldemar of Russia and his ally Dietrich of Greece. After twenty years of exile Attila lends him an army of Huns for his first attempt to recover his throne. Ermenrich's army is defeated, but Attila's two sons and Dietrich's younger brother are among the slain, whereupon Dietrich returns with the sad news to the land of the Huns.

Here the Dietrich saga is yet again interrupted, this time in favour of the Nibelungen saga.

Beginning with the quarrel between Brunhild and Kriemhild, the whole story of Siegfried's death and Kriemhild's vengeance is told in a form that agrees, in the main, with the version found in the *Nibelungenlied*. Dietrich's share in the final catastrophe differs only in minor points from the part he plays in the Middle High German epic. He refuses to lend himself to Kriemhild's plans, and holds aloof, at first, from the conflict; but on the death of his friend Rüdiger he joins in the fray, and himself takes prisoner Hagen, the last survivor of the Burgundians. When all is over he returns to Bern, accompanied only by his wife Herrat and the faithful Hildebrand, for all his men have been slain. On the way they hear that Ermenrich has died and that Sibeche has seized the throne, but that Hildebrand's son Alebrand is holding Bern for Dietrich. On arriving near Bern Hildebrand meets and fights with Alebrand, and, after forcing him to tell his name, spares his life. Joyfully welcomed in Bern, Dietrich marches against Sibich, who is defeated and slain, after which the remainder of the book consists partly of more expeditions against dragons and giants, partly of accounts of the deaths of Hildebrand, Attila, Heime, and lastly Dietrich himself.

In this summary of the *Thidrekssaga* we have had our second reference only to Dietrich's origin

and our first to his end. Of the medieval German poems only *Dietrichs Flucht* and the *Anhang zum Heldenbuch* (really a sort of preface to a collection of epic poems from various saga cycles) give accounts of his origin, and these two accounts are of distinctly different types, historical and mythical. In *Dietrichs Flucht*, as in the *Thidrekssaga*, we find a genealogy based on historical tradition. Both retain the name of Theoderic's father Theodemer (in the forms Dietmar and Thetmar); both are further true to history in giving Theodemer two brothers, and both true to an old form of the saga, though false to history, in recognising Ermanaric as one of those brothers. Beyond this, however, the two genealogies have nothing in common, except that both are free inventions. The author of the *Thidrekssaga* was content with the introduction of Samson as Dietrich's grandfather. But the author of the genealogy given in *Dietrichs Flucht* gave his fancy free play, and followed his hero's ancestry through his grandfather Amelung to the grandfather of the first husband of a princess whose second husband was Dietrich's great-great-grandfather. The name Amelung he introduced, no doubt, to account for the traditional designation of Dietrich's followers as Amelungs, but this term ought historically to be confined to Dietrich himself and the other members of the royal house founded by the legendary Amalus mentioned by Jordanes.

According to the mythical tradition, derived, presumably, from Dietrich's mythical rôle as conqueror of the giants and the dwarfs, his birth, like that of so many heroes of *saga*, was mysterious, and his real father was not Dietmar, but some supernatural being. Of the details of the story we know nothing, but its existence is hinted at in the *Thidrekssaga* and confirmed by the modified version found in the *Anhang zum Heldenbuch*, where an evil spirit named Machmet (= Mahomet), though not actually Dietrich's father, exercises on him a pre-natal influence.

Concerning Dietrich's end most of the poems of the cycle are silent; but from two of them, as well as from the *Thidrekssaga* and other sources, we know that tradition told of his mysterious disappearance. As early as the sixth century, that in which Theoderic's death took place, a story was current to the effect that after his death Theoderic's body was carried off by the devil and cast into the crater of a volcano. This story, invented by the Italian clergy to destroy the popularity of the great king whom they regarded as a heretic and the murderer of Boethius, spread beyond Italy and reappears in later centuries in various forms. A twelfth century chronicler, Otto von Freisingen, mentions a tradition that Dietrich died no natural death, but rode alive to hell on

horseback. Similar to this is the story in the *Thidreksaga*, which tells how one day, as he was bathing, Dietrich saw a stag not far away and was immediately filled with a great desire to pursue it. Suddenly a coal-black steed appeared, but, when Dietrich had mounted, it carried him off with such speed that none could follow. It was, in fact, the devil himself, and Dietrich was never seen again. The same story forms the subject of a relief in Verona, and was also current in the fourteenth century in a slightly different form in Spain.

The idea, however, that Dietrich was carried off bodily to hell must have been very unpalatable to his medieval admirers, and it is probably to this fact that we owe the considerable differences between the remaining traditions and those just mentioned. According to *Etzels Hofhaltung* the devil in the shape of a black horse carried him off not to hell, but to the desert of Ruunenei, there to fight with dragons till the Day of Judgment; the Swedish *Didriksaga* tells how he rode away secretly on a black horse to take vengeance on Witege, slew the traitor, but died of his wounds on the homeward journey; in the *Anhang zum Heldenbuch* he is led away by a dwarf into a hollow mountain and never seen again; and in the popular belief he has become one of Wodan's Wild Huntsmen.

Apart from Dietrich the four most important figures of the saga are Ermenrich, Hildebrand, Witege, and Heime. Of these Ermenrich represents, as we have seen, a combination of the historical Ermanaric and Odoacer. For Hildebrand, too, at least in his character of tutor and guardian, we have a historical parallel in Gensimund, whose loyal devotion to Theoderic's father and uncles during their minority preserved them their inheritance. The difference of name is sufficiently accounted for by the early incorporation in the Dietrich saga of the pre-Germanic story of combat between father and son. The *Hildebrandslied* shows that the father, in the Germanic version of the story, bore the name of Hildebrand; after his introduction into the Dietrich saga he was presumably identified with the hero's aged guardian and instructor, whose real name became superfluous and disappeared.

Another partly historical figure is Witege identical, in his capacity of Ermenrich's vassal, with the *Vidigoia*, *Gothorum fortissimus*, who, according to Jordanes, overcame the Sarmatians by guile and was the hero of epic songs. In his desertion from Dietrich to Ermenrich we have, perhaps, a reminiscence of Tufa's desertion from Theoderic to Odoacer, while his chief act of treachery, the surrender of Ravenna, suggests confusion with the incompetent king Witigis,

whose capitulation in Ravenna in 540 A.D. to an inferior force under Belisarius was felt by the Goths as a national disgrace. For Heime, however, Witege's comrade in treachery, there is no trace of a historical origin; he and another Witege(?), whose deeds were afterwards ascribed to the historical Vidigoia-Witege, seem from their supernatural origin to have been the heroes of a nature-myth, and to have been introduced into the Dietrich from the Ermanaric saga.

The other characters, such as the hot-headed Wolfhart, whose impetuosity in the *Nibelungenlied* brings about the death of all Dietrich's followers except Hildebrand; Alphart, whose untimely end at the hands of Witege and Heime filled Dietrich's camp with mourning; and Elsan, whose failure to keep watch over Etzel's sons was atoned for by death, according to some, by retirement to a monastery, according to other versions, and who reappears in *Laurin* as the monk Ilsung, to whom the captive dwarf is handed over for instruction and conversion to Christianity, and in the *Rosengarten zu Worms* as the abusive and quarrelsome monk Ilsan, were all, so far as we can tell, introduced at later stages in the development of the saga.

We can now form some idea of the medieval Dietrich epic that might have existed had some poet of sufficient ability made a selection from

the many separate Dietrich poems and stories, and, by the introduction of suitable motives, combined them into a harmonious whole. This task was, indeed, attempted by the original author of the *Thidrekssaga*, but his work was disfigured by a later redactor, a mere compiler who introduced so much extraneous matter that the *Thidrekssaga*, as we know it, is rather a compendium of Germanic hero saga than a Dietrich epic. Heinrich der Vogler, too, the author of *Dietrichs Flucht* and the *Rabenschlacht*, seems to have aimed at uniting the historical Dietrich traditions into a continuous epic under the title *Das Buch von Bern*; but his powers and patience proved unequal to the task. His work is incomplete and tedious, while his style lacks both the artistic finish of the Court Epic and the sprightliness of the Popular Epic. His two poems are, in fact, æsthetically the least satisfactory of all the poems of the cycle. None of them, it must be confessed, can lay claim to much artistic finish and restraint, but all except *Dietrichs Flucht* and the *Rabenschlacht* are at least good examples of the art of the wandering gleemen. The *Eckenlied* and *Sigenôt* have the merit of life and action, and so, too, have the poems of the *Virginal* group, in spite of their prolixity; the *Rosengarten zu Worms* abounds in humour—of a somewhat grotesque and primitive nature, it is true; *Laurin* is not with-

out humour of the same type, besides descriptive passages of much charm and touches of court refinement, and *Alpharts Tod* reaches a high standard in its directness, tragedy, and pathos.

Beyond the *Thidrekssaga*, however, and Heinrich der Vogler's *Buch von Bern* we know of no medieval attempt to use for a great epic the splendid material offered by the stories and poems of the Dietrich saga. And yet this saga, which had for its central figure a noble king, though of surpassing valour always slow to draw the sword, and though beloved by his subjects forced into exile by the treachery of his enemies and by his own chivalrous self-sacrifice; this saga, which was full of dramatic situations and not lacking in such striking figures as Ermenrich, the type of cruelty and greed, Sibeche his evil counsellor, Hildebrand, the faithful guardian, in spite of his years one of Dietrich's doughtiest warriors, and always ready with advice and help, Wolfhart, young, hot-headed, ever thirsting for the fray, and Witege, cunning and mercenary, turned traitor for the sake of gold; this saga with its record of adventures among giants and dwarfs and dragons, of long years of exile filled with valiant deeds, and of victorious return at last, seems to have all the essentials for a German Odyssey that might have borne comparison with the story of Ulysses itself.

LIST OF THE MORE IMPORTANT POEMS OF THE DIETRICH CYCLE

1. *The Hildebrandslied*, probably of Low German origin, but brought to Fulda (East Franconia) in the eighth century.

2. *Dietrichs Flucht*,
3. *Die Rabenschlacht*, { written by an Austrian, Heinrich der Vogler, towards the end of the thirteenth century.

4. *Alpharts Tod*, a Bavarian poem from the latter part of the thirteenth century.

5. *Das Eckenlied*, well known in both Northern and Southern Germany in the thirteenth century. Probably of Tyrolese origin.

6. *Sigenôt*, a High German poem, dating perhaps from the latter part of the thirteenth century. Probably of Tyrolese origin.

7. *Virginal*, *Dietrichs erste Ausfahrt*, and *Dietrich und seine Gesellen*, varying versions of a Tyrolese story and probably dating as poems from the end of the thirteenth century.

8. *Laurin*, or *Der kleine Rosengarten*, dating from the end of the thirteenth century, and of Tyrolese origin.

9. *Goldemar*, a fragment of a poem written by a certain Albrecht von Kemenaten in the thirteenth century and based on a Tyrolese story.

10. *The Thidrekssaga*, in prose, originally composed in Norway, about the middle of the thirteenth century, by an Icelandic saga-writer whose sources were poems and

stories then current in North Germany ; recast and largely expanded a generation later by a redactor.

To these might perhaps be added :

11. *Biterolf und Dietleib*, an Austrian poem from the early part of the thirteenth century.

12. *Der Rosengarten zu Worms*, or *Der grosse Rosengarten*, an Austro-Bavarian poem from the latter part of the thirteenth century.

Excluding Nos. 1 and 10, these poems, together with a few more dealing with other sagas, are frequently grouped together under the title of *Das Heldenbuch*, the name given by Kaspar von der Roen to a collection published by him in 1472.

